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ABSTRACT

For over 40 years, there has been a sustained and persistent effort to remove any reference to speech or spoken language from the name of the Speech Communication Association. The term "speech" has received constant criticism, mainly on political grounds, and has given way to today's more prevalent term of "communication." By giving in to the call to get rid of reference to speech, the Association would be engaging in complicity with political oppression. From the Association's inception in 1892, the official name had been altered at least four times until 1946, when it officially became the "Speech Association of America." In 1970 it became the "Speech Communication Association," but in 1976, 1984, 1989 and 1992, moves were made to change the name. The latter three occasions each involved a move to change the name officially to the "American Communication Association," and each time the moves failed. Despite various theoretical arguments for and against the term "speech" being used in the Association's name, there are no sufficient reasons yet for dropping "Speech" from the title. Until a definitive argument explains to the satisfaction of all just why the term "speech" is unworthy, it should remain in place as part of the Association's title. (HB)

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1992 SCA Convention, Chicago, IL
30 Oct '92, 2:30-3:50pm
Blvd.B-Level 2, Chicago Hilton

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Rhetorical Purpose: To Inform

Specific Purpose: To develop within the audience an appreciation of one view of the continuing efforts to downplay or remove usage of the term and concept of "SPEECH" from the title of the Association and of the Association's publications as the result of complicity with oppression.

Time: 12 minutes

Title: Deja Vu All Over Again
12"

INTRODUCTION

I. In 1950, 42 years ago, I joined what was then the Speech Association of America.

A. Since joining I seem to have been continuously engaged in a series of academic skirmishes designed to define and re-define our discipline, our field, our subject-matter.

I do not believe that these skirmishes have always been caused by substantive conceptual issues. Over the past 42 years there has been a sustained and persistent effort to remove any reference to speech or spoken language from our disciplinary association's name. What may be the roots of this campaign to abandon a disciplinary birthright? How has the campaign dealt with dissent and conceptual argument? How have we come to the point of a disciplinary historical revisionism which now even labels Aristotle, not as a philosopher or rhetorician, but as a communication scholar. Really!

It is my view that the conceptual arguments underlying the inclusion of "speech" or "spoken language" in the Association's name and the discipline's descriptors have seldom, if ever, been confronted and that those who would eliminate references to "speech" argue from political battlements. It is also my view that many of us, intimidated by the sources of these political assaults and by the "big guns" who have been drawing a bead on us,

engage in complicity with political oppression,
participate in ill-advised acts.

Whatever the power of the intellectual argument - the
arguments and the arguers may collapse before the
onslaught of abusive clout and elderly timidity.

- II. I believe that spoken language is an incontrovertible
manifestation of human communication. In fact the concept
"spoken language" may be coterminous with the concept "human
communication." I loathe getting rid of all reference to
speech in our association's name. I think that if we do so we
are caving in to a misguided historical revisionism as well as
the pressure of grant monies and arrogant colleagues. If we do
so we will be engaging in complicity with political
oppression.

BODY

- III. A history of the struggle: "You can observe a lot just by
watching." Yogi Berra

- 1892 National Association of Elocutionists
- 1906 National Speech Arts Association
- 1914-15 (Nov. 28, 1914) National Association of Academic
Teachers of Public Speaking
- 1923 National Association of Teachers of Speech
- 1946 Speech Association of America
Feb 11-16, 1968 SCA/USOE Conf. in New OrL. 24yrs ago.
"Spoken symbolic interaction is the central focus of
study in the s-c area." A focus, not a boundary
An area, not a discipline
- NSSC/ICA 1949-50/1969-70
- 1970 from Speech Association of America to
Speech Communication Association
- 1976 An SCA Committee to Consider a Name Change: The Committee
considered, argued and discussed and the result was "no
immediate action." I served on that Committee and
suggested that whatever the Committee recommended we
should insist that any name change of the Speech
Communication Association should take place only after

an exhaustive airing of the issues involved and a subsequent ballot submitted to the entire membership of the SCA.

1984

After a good deal of administrative and membership and legislative council discussion, a constitutional amendment to change the name of the SCA to the American Communication Association was voted upon.

The proposal to change the name was defeated. The August, 1985 Spectra reported a 54.2% supportive vote.

1989

5 years later after a GREAT deal of administrative and membership and legislative council discussion-including active campaigning for the proposed name change- again to the American Communication Association- by then SCA President Michael Osborn in his regional presentations and including an issue of SPECTRA in which the arguments pro and con were presented. With Bruce Gronbeck ably presenting the argument in favor of a name change to the American Communication Association and Frank Dance presenting the conceptual and practical arguments against such a name change another Constitutional Amendment ballot was sent out to the entire membership.

The vote failed to support the name change proposal. In this vote a total of 2,634 votes was cast on the issue of the name change, 1,652 in favor and 982 in opposition. Of the votes cast 62.7% supported the proposal to change the name.

When the results were published in Spectra in August, 1989 the report said: "While a strong majority of SCA members voted to change the name of the Association, the specific proposal to change the name to the American Communication Association did not receive the two-thirds majority required by the SCA Constitution." The name change was voted down.

Yet the announcement of the will of the members suggested a sulking acceptance of their vote.

I would like to point out that 1,652 was not even a weak majority of the total SCA membership. 1,652 even failed to meet the constitutional (Article X) requirement for passage, of a yea vote by two thirds of those voting. Given the argument that **not voting** may suggest satisfaction with or even support of the status quo (SCA) one might even state that an overwhelming majority of the

SCA membership failed to support the name change initiative.

Following that vote, in September, 1989, I suggested that "If there is a widely distributed sentiment in favor of some kind of identification other than the one presently in place, let us start now to consider the issue with care, mutual respect, and deliberate speed."

1992: Three years after the last vote, in response to a motion coming from the Mass Communication Division, another Constitutional Amendment Ballot which would change the name from the Speech Communication Association to the American Communication Association--**DEJA VU**-- was sent to the entire SCA membership.

I would like to note that I was completely silent during this most recent skirmish believing that I had had my say in the 1989 campaign. In fact I thought there was a good likelihood of this amendment being passed. The results of the balloting were announced on the front page of the August, 1992 SPECTRA.

Spectra, August, 1992. Name change defeated

The SCA membership voted to not change the name of the Association to the American Communication Association.

A total of 3,130 votes were cast on the issue of the name change, 1,696 in favor and 1,434 in opposition. The 54.2 percent supporting vote did not reach the 66.6 percent majority needed for the constitutional change required to alter the name of the Association.

In keeping with Pavlov's law of neuronal excitation and habituation the SCA voting membership may be becoming insensitive to the issue since the support in 1992, when the total membership was approximately 6700, was back to the 1984 level.

IV. This isn't the place to review all of the conceptual arguments for the inclusion of "speech" or "spoken language" in our disciplinary and Association titles. I do not believe that the conceptual arguments have been openly confronted, (Although Mike Burgoon made an approach in his Communication Education essay entitled "Divorcing Dame Speech") let alone met.

V. Aside from the problems created by the constant search by some for a name change we now find essays such as the one by Charles in Communication Monographs 58/1991/101-113 and the responses to it by Burleson, et al. Essays alluded to in this convention's program,

p. 174 (#3205), as providing "A penetrating assessment of the state of development of theories in communication." The essays in question are interesting and are provocative. The essays in question simply seem to ignore theories such as those put forward by Ernest Bormann, Walter Fisher, and the "Speech Theory of Human Communication" championed by yours truly. It is one thing to challenge or disprove theories, it is another thing to ignore and dismiss them.

CONCLUSION

VI. Why not "speech?"

In her ode to the ultimate hickey, Anne Rice in The Vampire Lestat, has a senior vampire (tenured) MARIUS ruminate on the importance of questions.

"Very few beings really seek knowledge in this world. Mortal or immortal, few really ask. On the contrary, they try to wring from the unknown the answers they have already shaped in their own minds--justifications, confirmations, forms of consolation without which they can't go on. To really ask is to open the door to the whirlwind. The answer may annihilate the question and the questioner."

THE VAMPIRE LESTAT. Ann Rice. Alfred A. Knopf (NY), 1985. p. 332.

Well, I am not satisfied with the political motivations lurking behind the proposed name changes nor with the view of many that such name changes are a fait accompli. I still ask of each and all

"Why NOT "speech?"
